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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IT](#) [ITALIAN POLITICS](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY: NEW BERLUSCONI GOVERNMENT CONFIRMED

REF: A) ROME 1442, B) ROME 1409

¶1. (U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; NOT FOR INTERNET
DISTRIBUTION.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: The new Italian Government led by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi received its final confidence vote from the Senate on April 28. The Chamber of Deputies gave the new Government its confidence on April 27. The Government retains its significant parliamentary majority, provided the four larger partners stay on board. However, tensions between coalition partners remain. Approaching elections will likely exacerbate those strains. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (U) The Senate on April 28 voted 170 in favor, 117 opposed, in straight coalition voting (all center-right in favor and all center-left opposed) to confirm Berlusconi III. (Ref B) This vote followed Chamber of Deputies approval on April 27, with 334 votes in favor, 240 against, and two abstentions, also in straight coalition voting. Together, four larger coalition partners (Forza Italia, FI; National Alliance, AN; Union of Christian Democrats of the Center, UDC; and Northern League, Lega) retain a significant parliamentary majority. (The two smaller coalition partners, New Italian Socialists (PSI) and Italian Republicans (PRI) have no Senate seats and seven Chamber seats between them.)

¶4. (SBU) Tensions remain in the governing coalition, however. AN leader Gianfranco Fini called Berlusconi's presentation of the new Government's new program "an essential speech which decisively indicated end-of-term objectives and took in our requests to focus our attention on the south, business, and family income in the next couple of months." UDC leader Marco Follini, however, delivered a unenthusiastic reply on behalf of his party, saying "We cannot coast toward 2006 as if everything were already decided -- the structure of the coalition, the leader, and perhaps, even the result. I would not be loyal or constructive if I said 'everything's fine, we've already made the needed changes, we're happy.' That's not the way it is," Follini concluded. The Northern League's group leader in the Chamber, Alessandro Ce, helpfully addressed his coalition partners saying, "There is no axis of the north, but an axis of change, and it was your inadequacy and not the Lega's aggressiveness that made you lose your electors."

¶5. (SBU) The opposition, meanwhile, reacted to the creation of the new Government as expected. Democrats of the Left (DS) leader Piero Fassino addressed Berlusconi directly, saying, "You did not have the courage (to face elections) because you knew you would have lost them. Your allies decided not to call elections so they can wait a bit to see who can lead the coalition in 2006. Italy is a great country and deserves a great government; instead, it is being led by a very small government." Calling the center-right "deeply divided," Daisy leader Francesco Rutelli charged that PM Berlusconi failed over the past four years to enact his program. Opposition leader Romano Prodi commented that Berlusconi only repeated proposals already presented over the past four years.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: Imminent national elections will either exacerbate the strains within the center-right coalition or force the partners to work more closely together. If they fail to deliver something to voters, particularly in the economic arena, it is hard to see how the center-right could win re-election. Nonetheless, the tendency toward disintegration seems stronger thus far than that of hanging together to avoid hanging separately.

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